

# Château Climens

*2013 Vintage: And the storm gave birth to a star...*

*Beautiful is the drop of water on the branch. It is not too small to be the mirror of the sun.*  
*Friederich Rückert*

*All beginnings are difficult, but without a beginning there is no end. (German proverb)*



It is probably not necessary to insist on the winter and ‘spring’ weather conditions that prevailed before the birth of this 2013 vintage, but just for posterity, we ought to summarise the scenario. Winter was quite mild and in particular was the wettest we’ve had for the past 20 years, and spring was the spitting image of typical November weather. Let’s acknowledge the positive side of things: despite everything we were able to get our biodynamic sprays and treatments into the vines in good time, and a short sunny period in April shining happily onto the budbreak. If the first week of June appeared to bring back the sun, the worst was still to come, just as the conjunction between the perigee and the new moon had suggested. Mid June gave us a dreadful week – storms and torrential rains (up to 53 mm of rain at Château Climens in one day) plagued Vinexpo, but moreover, plagued the vines that desperately needed dry weather as the flowering was imminent! It was so cold that the traditional St Jean bonfires were more like fireplaces

Then the summer was suddenly upon us: we could hardly complain, but this brutal change in weather did not help the flowering which was already quite troubled; now it was being given competition from the foliage suddenly growing due to the heat. These extreme conditions hit the vintage hard: coulure (flower abortion) and millerandage (partial crop failure) would have an irreparable impact on the harvest. But how can we complain when we were spared the terrible damage that destroyed a year or several years’ harvest for many winemakers in the region!

The erratic vegetative growth also complicated the jobs of lifting and tying the shoots but the enduring dry weather, generally hot in the day and cool at night, saved us from cryptogamic diseases (with the help of an early leaf removal exercise and regular biodynamic treatments of course).

Despite the good summer which kept our moods up, it was impossible for the vines to make up for their late development. And then the return of autumnal weather in September hardly overjoyed us: the grapes were resolutely green, the yields most irregular and a few patches of grey rot punctuated the blocks carrying greater yields (ironically, coulure and millerandage mainly affected our old vines that are naturally lower yield-bearers). Struck by this arrest in the vines, we decided with Corinne Comme to use one last biodynamic treatment aimed at stimulating the ripening.



*One should always be shod and ready to take off. (Montaigne)*



The return of the summer conditions so longed for in mid- September, helped with ripening the grapes, and almost simultaneously the development of noble rot on certain blocks! We were somewhat expecting a late harvest this year, but luckily the winemakers in Sauternes, just like a good scout, are always ready! And so the harvest began on Friday 27th September, with a small group of pickers for two days in some of the early ripening blocks. The health of the vines was excellent overall and with the botrytis really seeming to have become master of the vineyards, we were back harvesting again on Monday 30th, while organising the arrival of our Portuguese team at the same time.

As Danièle, our head harvester, was absent due to a nasty sprain, both of us were particularly in demand: we had simultaneously to keep a close watch over the extremely delicate picking and gallop from one block to another during the pickers' breaks in order to update the joyful tasks ahead. There was not a minute to break the rhythm, with having to train new harvesters, incessant checking of rows and baskets, encouraging, explaining and adjusting, organising the team carrying the grapes and changing blocks, recording the number of baskets brought in for the stats, and even marking each harvester on a daily basis to manage the bonuses for high quality work. That is just a glimpse of our daily activities, to which we must add the obsessive consulting of every weather station and website under the sun.



We had no margin for error, especially since a storm was forecast for the Thursday 3rd October on all of the said weather sites... Luckily we managed to finish our first stage of picking at about 19h00 that very day! The timing was perfect: at 22h00 the forecast storm hit the region. We were exhausted, but oh, how relieved to have 57 barrels of fabulous quality tucked up safely in the cellars!



The next morning the sight of the roadsides on the way to Climens, paved with finely shredded leaves from the trees had us really worried, but once again we had been spared, only just, by this hail storm. As for the rain, we had 50 mm overnight and that was just the beginning... While we had simply to wait for the noble rot to return, the red grape vineyards had to declare a state of emergency, or 'dry-out' campaign! We were happy to lend a helping hand and sent some of our team of harvesters as back-up to some winemaker friends. After 8 days of break, a brief reprise was necessary on 11th October: there were once again a few concentrated 'preserved' grapes which would not have stood up to another bout of rains that were predicted. The potential sugar degree was more than acceptable at a little over 21° and on tasting the musts it confirmed their perfect state. Fortunately though, there was hardly any to pick as yet another heavy shower hit us on the morning of the 12th October, diluting inexorably the concentration of the end of this partial stage of picking. This is a reminder of the fragility of things, which makes what we already have safely in the cellars all the more precious...

*Why throw yourself overboard when the boat has not yet sunk? (Chinese proverb)*

And so the long wait began again. Drizzle, overcast sky and mild temperatures alternated with sun and stormy showers, keeping us on our toes. The noble rot was there indeed, all around us, but it was just lacking those few degrees of concentration that we needed in order to pick the grapes. It was also at that stage, where any more rain could well have destroyed the entire crop still on the vines. Given the confusing forecasts, we tried to 'stop the weather', as one tries to stop smoking. On Friday 18th October, a few analyses of samples taken confirmed that there was still not enough concentration and that we still needed to wait a few more days. We tried to put ourselves in the mindset of an old sage, ready to accept whatever the skies cast upon him, resisting both hope and despair. But, unquestionably, our guardian angel likes salutary weekends and with the benediction of the new moon, gave us a sunny, windy Saturday and an almost summery Sunday!



Precisely what we needed to shoot up the sugars by those few necessary degrees. So off we set again on Monday 21st for the last round of 4 days, following on immediately with the second and third stages depending each block. The way the grapes resisted the few showers over the past few weeks was incredible. We were amazed that the harvest, showing a lovely level of concentration was absolutely healthy. We must say though, that the bunches had a very loose formation - an advantage of the coulure and millerandage...

The sky was really clear at dawn and the mild temperatures were astonishing. The afternoon turned out to be really hot and the weather became oppressive over the days that followed. But Lady Luck remained with us until the very end: the last snip of the secateurs was on Thursday at midday, with the arrival of huge clouds that had the good grace to wait until the afternoon to unload their cargo of rains! The year 2013 was definitely a roller-coaster adventure with an ending we could not have hoped better for. The sudden twist in situations was like a fairytale at times, in which the noble rotter, with his double-sided magic wand would be controlled by the sun, the moon and some more or less lucky stars. And what of the winemakers? Hardworking, obstinate little elves, at times grumpy, at times HAPPY...

*Bérénice Lurton*

*Frédéric Nivelle*

*A few facts and figures for the 2013 vintage :*

*First vintage at Château Climens to be certified organic (AB)*

Harvest from 27<sup>th</sup> September to 24<sup>th</sup> October  
(13 days of harvesting in 3 stages over 4 weeks)

From 27<sup>th</sup> September - 3<sup>rd</sup> October

1<sup>st</sup> stage of picking : 50 % of the harvest

*Break for 8 days*

11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> October

2<sup>nd</sup> stage of picking : 11 % of the harvest

*Break for 8 days*

From 21<sup>st</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> October

End of 2<sup>nd</sup> stage, 3<sup>rd</sup> stage, part of 4<sup>th</sup> stage : 39% of the harvest

16 lots and a yield of about 10hl/Ha.



Tasting notes :

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*Photos G. Charneau and Frédéric Nivellet*